

Remarks at a Campaign Reception

October 27, 2023

The President. Please sit down. Sit down.

My name is Joe Biden. I'm a friend of Esther Coopersmith's. *[Laughter]* Esther has been helping me for a long, long, long time.

Sean, thank you for that introduction, by the way.

Esther, you've been a great friend for so long. I want to say in front of everybody, even though Jill's not here, I love you, kid. *[Laughter]* No, I really do. She's been helping me for longer than she wants to admit.

But—and, Linda, thank you for your support. And I want to thank—Kamala and I are incredibly, incredibly grateful to everyone here. You know, I wanted to acknowledge Virginia—the Virginia House majority [minority; White House correction] leader, who is soon going to be the Speaker of the House.

Where are you, Mr. Speaker—soon-to-be?

Audience member. Right here. Right here.

The President. There you are.

I want you to know, you guys are sending me money, and I'm sending it to Virginia. *[Laughter]*

You know, many of you in this yard are trial lawyers. I aspired to be a trial lawyer. I couldn't do it, so I decided to be a Senator. *[Laughter]*

As I like to say, you're one of the few groups standing between us and the barbarians at the gate. And you—you're the ones standing up to the tobacco industry, gun manufacturers, and other corporate—corporations that need to be held accountable. And I really mean that.

Think of what would happen if we didn't have a trial bar. I'm not joking about that. Imagine if we hadn't succeeded with the tobacco industry. You know, we need your help now to end immunity from liability for gun manufacturers. *[Inaudible]*—the only corporate entity in America, by law, exempted. It's got to stop. It's got to stop.

You see what's happened recently up in—anyway, I won't go into it. But it just is outrageous. You know, who the hell needs an assault weapon that can hold up to—in some cases, up to a hundred rounds? You know, it's just—there's no reason for those—those AR-15s other than to kill people. They're not designed—I—when I was able, along with Dianne Feinstein, to end [pass; White House correction] the assault weapons ban back years ago—a—*[inaudible]*—where we could only do it for 10 years. Then Bush got elected, and he let it lapse. But you know, mass murders dropped off considerably. Considerably.

And I remember going through Delaware. In the southern part of the State, there's a lot of—awful lot of duck hunting, a lot of hunters in the State. And I was going through, trying to make the case, because I was running, for banning assault weapons.

And I had a guy—so I was walking through the swamp area—for real—and a guy is in there fishing, and he looked at me. He said, "Biden, you're going to take my damn guns away from me."

I said: "I'm not going to take your guns away. I'm just going to take some." *[Laughter]* I said—no, I'm serious. I said, "The Second Amendment doesn't say you can own a cannon. It doesn't say you can own a machinegun. It doesn't say"—I went down the list.

And he said, "Well, I need it." And I said, "You a hunter?" And he said, "Yes." I said, "You must be one hell of a lousy shot." *[Laughter]* No, I'm serious. And I said, "Most deer I know in Delaware aren't wearing Kevlar vests." *[Laughter]*

At any rate, the bottom line is that, you know, it's—it just is outrageous what's happening. And we need you. We need you badly. Not a joke.

And I was proud to sign Ending Forced Arbitration for Sexual Assault and Harassment. We should ban forced arbitration. We're almost—and other kinds of dispute as well. You know—I—you know, you share my belief in the importance of increasing—increased diversity in the courts. When I got elected, I said a couple of things: Number one, I wanted my administration to look like America. And it does.

By the way, I was raised in—by women and with—women are a hell of a lot smarter than I am. So we have more women in my Cabinet than men. Not a joke.

And I've been more focused on diversity backgrounds on the bench than any President in American history. Kamala and I have gotten 147 judges confirmed; two-thirds are women, and two-thirds are people of color.

We put the first Black woman on the Supreme Court. And guess what? She's smarter than the rest of them too. I made a commitment I—no, she's incredible. And I've appointed more Black women in the Federal circuit courts than every single President combined in American history.

I've gotten a heck of a lot done. I especially want to thank Kamala for her leadership on so many important issues.

You know, we're here tonight because we all believe the country faces a clear choice in November. We're the only nation—the only nation—in the world founded on an idea. Every other nation is founded on ethnicity, religion, or whatever, but not us. We're founded on—only one in the world founded—and it's—we don't focus on it enough—on an idea.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal, endowed by"—we never lived up to it completely, but we've never walked away from it. We're the only one founded on an idea.

And you know, Trump and the MAGA Republicans, they—they've walked away completely from the notion—that notion. You know, we're not going to walk away on my watch, and I need your help.

You know, when I made—you may remember when I ran in 2020 because you're the guys that got me elected. I'm not joking. Along with a hell of a lot of labor unions. *[Laughter]*

But look, you know, when we ran, we said that—I remember making a speech—and you may remember it; it got a lot of criticism. And they asked me—they asked why I was running. I said I was running for three reasons: One, to restore the soul of America, because over the last 4—the previous 4 years, it was basically lost; secondly, to build the country from the middle out and the bottom up, not from the top down; and, thirdly, to unite the country.

Well, you know, what happened was—and then—and then I making a speech—I ended up making a couple of speeches, it turned out, on democracy, because I said democracy was at risk.

My entire career, derocracy [democracy; White House correction] has never been, since the Civil War, at risk. But it's at risk. And everybody thought that's an exaggeration. The columnists—they don't do it anymore—talked about, "Well, that's an exaggeration."

Except, you know what? Sixty-seven percent of the American people agreed with me that democracy was at risk.

When I left the Vice Presidency at the end of the Obama-Biden administration, I had no intention of running for President or office again. I had just lost my son Beau to burn pits in—Iraq. He was there a year. And Charlottesville—then Charlottesville happened.

And I don't know if you remember what happened—people coming out of the woods, carrying torches—out of fields literally carrying torches down in Charlottesville. Nazi swastikas accompanied by the Ku Klux Klan and White supremacists, and singing the same vicious, anti-Semitic bile that was sung in Germany in the thirties. And a young woman was killed. A young woman was killed. And I met her mom—I spoke to her mom. And she was a bystander.

And they asked my predecessor, the guy who may be my opponent this time, what he thought. Remember what he said? Not joking. He said, "There are very fine people on both sides." "Very fine people on both sides."

What President since the time going back to the Civil War has said anything like that? "Very fine people on both sides."

Well, let me tell you something: That's when I decided I should run. Because I'm the antithesis of this guy who held office. And I really wasn't going to run, I swear to God, because, as I said, I just lost my son. He's the one who should be standing here talking to you—the attorney general and decorated war hero—not me.

But I got a call from—we have a tradition in my family that my dad started that any child—and this is literally—I mean, literal—any child can ask for a family meeting, and it's taken seriously. And if they ask for a family meeting—only 11 times that I can remember since I've been born that I remember it happening.

And my granddaughters asked for a family meeting. It was on a Thursday. One was a senior at Columbia Law School; two or three were at Penn. Anyway, they're all bright kids. And they came down, and we met in my—our house in Delaware. And they said, "Pop, you've got to"—they call me "Pop"—"Pop, you've got to run."

And I said, "It's going to be ugly, honey. I don't—I'm not sure"—because I wasn't sure I wanted to put them through it. Their whole lives, they had either had a father who was an attorney general or a grandfather who was a Senator or a Vice President or a President—or a Vice President.

And they said, "You've got to run." They gave me all the reasons for wanting to—why I should run. And my youngest one, who's now a senior in high school, named after—he's my—he's the son of my deceased son. His name is Hunter Biden. And Hunter said, "Pop, we know it's going to be ugly."

And he took out his cell phone—it's the truth—took out his cell phone, and he opened it up—not opened it. It wasn't open—it wasn't a flip phone; it was a regular phone. [Laughter] And he showed me a photograph of me walking out of St. Anthony's Catholic Church in Delaware—excuse me, St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Delaware with a military funeral with my hand on the casket, draped—flag-draped coffin with my son about to be buried, because he is—he had won the Citizen—the Bronze Star. Anyway—

And I had my hand on my little son [grandson; White House correction] Hunter like I used to hold my son Beau in church, and I had my hand under his chin holding him. Know what the caption read? It said, "Biden molests another child." As so he said, "We know it's going to be mean, Pop, but you got to run." And that's when I decided to run.

And as I said, one of the reasons I did—ran was to try to restore the soul of this country. We are not who that last guy was. We were in the battle for the soul of America. So I ran because everything this country stood for, everything we believed in, everything that made America "America," even our very democracy, was at risk.

I think people thought I was being hyperbolic when I said—I'd get: "Joe, what do you mean democracy is a risk? What do you mean we're in a battle for the soul of America?" Have you noticed most Presidential historians have now agreed with me?

Well, people don't say that anymore. I don't think anyone today doubts democracy was at stake in 2020. But I think it's still at stake in these upcoming elections.

Listen to what they've been saying. Listen to what the MAGA Republicans are talking about. Listen to the language they use. Listen to who they say we are. Listen to say—what they will do if they gain power.

You know, that's why Kamala and I are running again, because we made progress, but our democracy is still at stake. Because, folks, the same man who thought there were, quote, "very fine people on both sides" in Charlottesville, who called Hizballah "very smart"—"Hizballah is very smart"—who recently on more than one occasion has made jokes about the assault on Speaker Nancy Pelosi's husband.

Now, there are a lot of reasons Donald Trump shouldn't be President, but this one may be the rest [best; White House correction] reason of all. Folks, Kamala and I are asking the entire nation to join us in sending the strongest, clearest, most powerful message possible that political violence is never, never, never, never, never acceptable in America. Never. Never.

And Donald Trump and the MAGA Republicans are determined to destroy this democracy. And while MAGA Republicans in the House have been fighting among themselves, struggling to elect a Speaker until just now, trying to shut down the Government, sowing division at every turn, Kamala and I are always going to defend, protect, and fight for our democracy. That's why we're running. It's that basic.

This country we live in is so special. Kamala and I don't believe America is a dark, negative nation of carnage, driven by anger, fear, and revenge like the other team does.

And think of what they say. Think of—just listen to what they say.

And by the way, I've been serving in the Congress for 270 years. You know, I've been around a long time. [Laughter] But all kidding aside, you know, there's a lot of—this is not your father's Republican Party.

Many of you know me well. I was known in the United States Senate for those 36 years as being able to bring people together and was able to do that. I got an award for doing that by the Congress when I was leaving—by the Senate when I was leaving.

But this is a different breed of cat. These aren't the same guys. Donald Trump—Donald Trump—think of how he's been able to intimidate that party.

I've had seven senior Republicans who I served with, in the Senate still, who have said to me—and I gave my word I'd never mention who they were, and they don't even know who they are—I mean, one another—that—they made it real clear, "Joe, I agree with you, but if I—if I join

you, I'll be defeated in a primary that Trump will put together." Not a—not a lot of courage—profiles in courage, but it's a reflection of reality. You've seen it.

To his supporters, he says things like, "I'm your retribution." "We're a failing"—these are quotes. "We're a failing nation." "Either they win, or we win. If we win—if they win, we no longer have a country." Did you ever think you'd hear those words coming out of a sitting President's mouth or someone seeking that office?

Folks, that's what's at stake. Democracy is literally on the ballot. Kamala and I need you. You all—and most of you, I look around here, don't know any better. You've helped me for a long time. *[Laughter]*

The first time was your fault. *[Laughter]* No, but all—all kidding aside. I mean, we can't thank—I can't thank you enough. We need every American who loves our democracy to join us again in 2024. And if we do, we'll have done something few successive generations have been able to do. We will have saved democracy in America.

And I've never been more optimistic about America's future. I really mean it. Think about the possibilities we have.

You know, when I wasn't going to run, I was going to write a book—another book on the inflection points in American history. Almost all of the them have been affected by fundamental changes in technology.

Imagine had Gutenberg not invented the printing press. What would have happened in terms of the implication to Europe and to be able to communicate with one another? Go all the way through every single change that's occurred.

We don't have the means to communicate like we used to because there's no editors anymore. You don't know what's—you know, you don't know what to believe when you read it. There's no editors anymore.

But, folks, we're in a situation where the world is changing, and what happens in the next 4 years and the last 4, 5, 6 years is going to determine what this country looks like for the next six to eight decades. For real. Just like the postwar period.

We have an opportunity to unite the Middle East in a way we never thought. Saudi Arabia wants to deal with Israel. I've been working—at the G-20 in India, I got them to all agree and vote for building a railroad from Delhi all the way up to the—the Mediterranean through the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia and Qatar, all the way to Israel, and then across and pipeline it into Greece and then up.

I mean—because when people share a common economic need and consistency, they tend to work together.

So, look, you know, we just have to remember who we are. You know, we're the only country in the world, in my view—and, I mean—I challenge you who are historians to tell me where I'm wrong about this—only country in the world that's come out of every crisis we've ever entered stronger than we went in—stronger than—we've had serious crises, but stronger and better organized than we went in. That's where we are today.

And you know, I was talking to somebody who came up to me—and I'm not going to mention his name; don't want to embarrass him—in the photo line, telling me he was talking to the U.N., and there was people saying, "Thank you for the United States."

Folks, I've spent my entire career dealing with American foreign policy, either as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee or doing it for Barack in his term or—as—as Vice President—my term as Vice President, 8 years, or now.

One of the things I have learned: Madeleine Albright was right. We are the essential nation. That is not hyperbole. Not Joe Biden. We—the President of the United States is the essential—leader of the essential nation.

And every single leader I talk to, they—they almost come to—kind of stand at attention. We pull the world together. We've kept NATO together. We've kept everybody together in terms of taking on Putin. We're organizing the world relative to the attack on Israel. We're doing—I mean, we have an opportunity, but we also have enormous obligation.

We're the United States of America, for God's sake. And there's nothing, nothing beyond our capacity—nothing, I mean that—when we do it together.

So my objective hasn't changed. I'm still running for the same reason: to continue to build a consensus about what democracy means, continue to try to restore the soul of this country, and to continue to work in a way that we can deal with the fact that a minority—but a powerful minority—on the other team doesn't try to bring us down, doesn't try to turn this into some—like a circus.

So I want to thank you all for giving me another shot. I didn't plan on doing this, either. [Laughter] But I tell you what, I'm sure in hell not going to walk over with Trump on the horizon.

Thank you all so very, very much—[inaudible].

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:52 p.m. at the residence of Esther Coopersmith. In his remarks, he referred to Sean C. Domnick, civil trial lawyer and shareholder, Domnick Cunningham & Yaffa; Vice President Kamala D. Harris; Virginia House of Delegates Minority Leader Don Scott; former Presidents George W. Bush and Donald J. Trump; Supreme Court Associate Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson; Susan Bro, mother of Heather D. Heyer, who was killed during the vehicular attack in Charlottesville, VA, on August 12, 2017; Paul F. Pelosi, Sr., husband of Rep. Nancy Pelosi; Speaker of the House of Representatives J. Michael Johnson; and President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia. He also referred to his grandchildren Naomi K. Biden Neal and Natalie, Finnegan, and Maisy Biden. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 30. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Campaign reception.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Biden Neal, Naomi K.; Biden, Finnegan J.; Biden, Jill T.; Biden, Natalie P.; Biden, R. Hunter, II; Biden, Roberta M. "Maisy"; Bro, Susan; Bush, George W.; Coopersmith, Esther; Domnick, Sean C.; Harris, Kamala D.; Jackson, Ketanji Brown; Johnson, J. Michael; Obama, Barack; Pelosi, Nancy; Pelosi, Paul F., Sr.; Putin, Vladimir Vladimirovich; Scott, Don; Trump, Donald J.

Subjects: 2024 Presidential election; District of Columbia, Democratic Party event; Diversity, equity, and inclusion, improvement efforts; Firearm rights; Group of Twenty (G-20) nations; Gun violence, prevention efforts; India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor; Middle East, regional integration and security; North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Russia, President; Sexual assault and harassment; Speaker of the House of Representatives; Supreme Court Associate Justice; U.S. diplomatic efforts, expansion; Vice President; Virginia, 2017 civil unrest and violence.

DCPD Number: DCPD202300940.